

August 2006: Hot Topics Affecting California Agriculture

Following the recent heat wave emergency, Governor Schwarzenegger directed me to go to Washington D.C. this week to meet with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns and other federal officials, and press for prompt financial assistance. I urged them to act upon the Governor's request for a disaster designation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Governor sent [a letter requesting the USDA](#) to start their process immediately, prior to the final damage report. I have personally witnessed the terrible losses sustained by our agricultural industry due to the high temperatures. ([SacBee article](#))

Governor Schwarzenegger [visited a Central Valley dairy](#) for a first-hand look at the damage caused by the record-breaking heat wave. He also participated in a roundtable discussion with agricultural leaders, farmers, dairy producers and growers about the economic impact this extreme heat event has had on California agriculture.

Eight Central Valley counties (Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare) declared local emergencies. They were faced with the disposal of tens of thousands of animals that had died following two weeks of triple-digit temperatures that baked the region.

On August 2, Fresno County Agricultural Commissioner Jerry Prieto, Jr., declared a local disaster for help with related agricultural losses.

Cal/EPA has developed guidelines to assist them with [emergency carcass disposal](#) of these animals. The Governor's Office of Emergency Services has a [form online](#) to expedite the filing of preliminary loss reports by the counties. Preliminary county estimates of the number of cows that have died have already exceeded 20,000. The numbers could go much higher when dead calves, miscarriages, and the disruption of breeding programs are factored in. California dairy operators are asking for federal disaster assistance that could total up to \$1 billion just for their industry alone. Preliminary figures suggest milk production was cut from 20 percent to as much as 40 percent in some counties and deaths of chickens and turkeys number close to a million. Some initial county reports also mention sheep, swine and egg losses.

Some counties report tree fruit losses up to 50 percent during this harvest season. Others report sunburn of crops and pollination problems. Crops affected by the heat include almonds, walnuts, wine and table grapes, apples, plums, cling peaches, field and canning tomatoes, lettuce, beans, bell peppers, onions and other vegetables. Alfalfa yields have decreased due to lack of growth. Rice may be similarly affected. A percentage of the cotton crop has been damaged by excessive heat.



Governor Schwarzenegger visits Nash Dairy Farm and farmer Steve Nash in Selma, Fresno County, to talk about the toll of the recent heat wave on cattle and crops.
Photo: Governor's Office

The apiary industry is projecting a decrease of 35 percent in honey production this year.

In addition, the water supply faced more demands and additional costs to growers resulted from increased irrigation of heat-stressed plants in nursery and field settings. Overall fruit quality and size and the harvest season will be affected, which may impact California's global trade.

On a more positive note, my expectations were exceeded by the number of representatives from the ag industry, ag associations and the public who showed up to give testimony and listen during the last [21st century farm bill](#) listening session at the state Capitol on August 1. More than 120 people were in the audience and many of them also testified.

This was by far the largest of four listening sessions CDFA held across the state this year. Speakers presented testimony on farm bill titles, including specialty crops, conservation, nutrition, commodities and research.



Secretary Kawamura (center, middle of dais) chairs the 2007 farm bill listening session at the state Capitol in August. Photo: E. Williams / CDFA

The information gathered will be used to shape the California outlook on the farm bill and will potentially influence how the \$95 billion of funding will be allocated in 2007. California plays a critically important role in our national health and food security. These comments will help our department refocus the nation's understanding of food, fiber and fuel in the next round of farm bill discussions.

As always, thank you for your support and don't hesitate to contact my office with any questions or concerns.

A.G. Kawamura
Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture
1220 N St. Sacramento, CA 95814
916-654-0433



Sacramento County Farm Field Photo: E. Williams / CDFA